UNITED NATIONS

World Chronicle

PROGRAMME: No. 559, recorded 2 September 1994

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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Peter Hansen, Under-Secretary-General for the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs, discusses international efforts in providing humanitarian aid to needy people in many parts of the world. Disasters in Africa are increasingly man-made, rather than natural. The increasing demand for resources to meet the basic needs of the rising numbers of disaster victims arround the world is causing donor fatigue. In a number of countries, the removal of mines left over from armed conflicts should be an essential element of international humanitarian assistance programmes. Mr. Hansen believes that the forthcoming Social Summit offers a unique opportunity to utilize international efforts to reduce suffering and poverty on a broader scale.

WORLD CHRONICLE is produced by the Media Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.

Duration:	28:01"
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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**. As we approach the end of the century, the world is suffering from great turbulence and horror -- earthquakes, floods, droughts, famine and civil conflicts. These natural and manmade disasters cause untold destruction and human suffering. Tens of millions of people in many parts of the world are in dire need and depend upon international humanitarian assistance for their survival. For how long can the world community continue to provide sufficient aid to meet the basic needs of these people?

Our guest today coordinates international emergency relief assistance. He is Peter Hansen, Under-Secretary-General for the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs. Joining me to talk with Mr. Hansen are Segun Adeyemi of the News Agency of Nigeria and Ted Morello of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*. Mr. Hansen, welcome to World Chronicle.

We ask the question how long can the world community provide sufficient aid; in fact, the world community is not providing sufficient aid. I notice from the latest numbers that I have before me, which talk of requirements of about $2.5 billion and a shortfall of more than $1 billion, meaning that only 56 point something per cent is covered. Now, is this because of the famous donor fatigue that we keep reading about?

HANSEN: Well, I think it's probably a combination of factors. If we go back for the past several years for which we have figures, we will see that literally from year to year the demands have increased, and so we need more and more resources. With the same level of resources, we would have an ever greater shortfall. But there is a trend that is worrisome, and that is, as you say, maybe some 50 per cent of the needs are being met. If we go back as recently as '92, we had about three-quarters, or more than 70 per cent of the needs met. If we go up to now, we are actually further down already than that in that we only have about 40 per cent of the needs in Africa, and that's about 60 to 70 per cent of the needs in the new independent states in the former Soviet Union, and overall only some, as you said, 50 per cent met. So we are only having the cup half full.

LITTLEJOHNS: Africa is the biggest problem continent?

HANSEN: Africa is a problem continent, but there has been a shift in the occurrence of disasters, when we talk about civil disasters, in recent years. We have now seen the conflict zone spread into areas like Caucasus and Central Asia, where there are significant problems. We have problems in all continents, in fact -- in Central America,

in Haiti, in Asia, and in Africa, where the most dramatic and most severe recent crises have taken place.

LITTLEJOHNS: You were fairly recently in Rwanda. Tell us a bit about your impressions of the situation there, which must be absolutely terrible.

HANSEN: They are indeed absolutely terrible. When I was first there, when the UN troops were pulling out in April, it was a horrible scene of suffering, as much as you could see, because you could not travel very far into the country. But in and around Kigali, it was a terrible, terrible situation of suffering. When I was back more recently, there were new horrors. There were the horrors of Goma, there were the horrors --

LITTLEJOHNS: The refugee camps.

HANSEN: The refugee camps in Zaire and several.... But it was again a mixed picture. You had these horrors, but at the same time you had a return towards normalcy in Kigali and other parts of the country. I think it's important that we look not only at the horrors but also look at the fact that we can address the problems, and we can ameliorate the suffering, and we can help turn things around.

LITTLEJOHNS: Did you go to Burundi? Because people are very fearful about the situation there.

HANSEN: I did not have the chance at that time to go to Burundi. We have had our staff out to look at the situation there because people are fearful, as you say, and we always have to be prepared, so we can act as swiftly as the situation requires.

MORELLO: In the situation in Goma, how do you -- how much of the assistance that went in there came from non-traditional donors? That is to say there was some talk of -- of course, Zaire has made some contribution to the Rwanda refugees, but I was interested in the Secretary-General's report on where the money went. I saw nothing on where the money came from. Is there any increase in contributions by other than, say, the Scandinavian countries and western countries and so forth?

HANSEN: Well, you have your traditional donors, as it were -- you mentioned the Scandinavians, we could mention the Dutch, the Western Europeans, the Northern Americans, indeed, the US and Canada. But one thing that was very encouraging, and I think very striking, when we had the donors' conference[1] in Geneva for Rwanda in July, we saw a number of new non-traditional donors. If I remember correctly, it was Botswana that came with a contribution of over half a million dollars, and if you compare Botswana's gross national product with what they gave, I think without having

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[1] Pledging Conference on Rwanda.

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made the calculation that Botswana would come out very near if not at the top of those who gave most per capita or gave most in relation to what they could spare.

But, by the way, if I may just say that this distinction between donors and recipients is one we have to be a little bit careful with. If you consider a contribution to a crisis like that as a cost, you can ask who incurs the greater cost, the wealthy government, in so far as any governments are wealthy these days in the West, that can write out a check, or the country that receives a massive flash flood of refugees into their territory, as Tanzania and Zaire have recently done, with all the costs on the infrastructure, the health situation, the environment that these massive population movements entail. I would think that when it comes to carrying the burden of human catastrophe, the sharing in the world is a lot broader and a lot wider than this distinction between donors and recipients would indicate.

ADEYEMI: The consolidated appeal process is one of the major tools of the DHA, you know, in addressing humanitarian needs across the world. But I do know that the appeal for Angola, between February and July, I mean, in that appeal there were no pledges of contribution for FAO, UNHCR, and the UNDP. How will this kind of gap affect the efforts of the DHA?

HANSEN: Well, the consolidated appeal -- maybe to the uninitiated we should explain what it is. Governments would like, when they're being asked to give money, to know exactly what is the total bill, what are you going to ask us for. Don't come from ten different sides and ask for amounts. So what the UN does is that we try to assess the whole situation, we try to make up what the needs are over a longer period, like six months, and then we ask governments to cover what they would like to cover -- they're not directed. And you're quite right that in a situation like Angola, and indeed in many other situations, such programmes as agricultural rehabilitation have received very little by way of assessments, and it is part of the shortsighted nature that many approach these issues with. We have to think of the whole continuum, from the crisis, from the immediate survival needs, into enabling people to survive themselves. In Angola, as in Rwanda now, it is very important that, in this very moment, within these months and weeks, that the fields are being planted so that there will be a harvest next spring. For every kilo of seeds you put in the ground now you will have perhaps 100 kilos of harvest further down the road, and it clearly makes more sense to think of that rather than to think of a perpetual state of dependency.

ADEYEMI: Yes, if I may follow, is there a way of making up for these kinds of gaps? Like the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, which you chair, recommended -- I mean, asked its working group to recommend a new strategy for resource mobilization in

view of the dwindling resources for the donors. Is that -- I mean, has there been a recommendation in this regard?

HANSEN: Well, we could think of many ways in which better to mobilize resources and better to respond in a more coherent way to the needs, and that is indeed part of what we do. But there is no magic wand that anyone can wave to get resources to come in the direction of where the gaps are. It's really all up to the donors as the system is constituted.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Hansen, how do you explain the neglect of Angola? Because that situation's been going on for quite a long time, and people have been suffering very greatly there. Is it -- are people getting impatient that the two sides, UNITA and the government, can't get together and solve the problem? People feel that -- let them stew in their own juice, as they say?

HANSEN: Well, I think there might be an element of that, simple impatience. These two parties have now been negotiating for a very long time, and many in the donor community do not feel that they have made enough of an effort to reach an agreement that has been under negotiation for very, very long. But I think it would be rather narrow and very shortsighted to punish the millions of people who are suffering terribly, unspeakably, in Angola because they are frustrated with their leaders and their lack of will to reach an agreement. You asked how terrible Rwanda is, and we have all seen these horrors on television that are unspeakable. But if you talk about Angola, you have the phenomenon of besieged cities, cities like Malange, Cuito, Dondo. Malange and Cuito have not received relief supplies now for months and months. They are surrounded by land mines. People who would go outside the city to try to find a root, to try to find anything growing to eat, would do so at the risk of having their legs blown off.

LITTLEJOHNS: So people are literally starving to death?

HANSEN: People are literally starving to death in these cities.

LITTLEJOHNS: And the outside community doesn't seem to be aware of this. I mean, there are no television images of the situation in Angola, but plenty from Somalia some months ago, and more recently from Rwanda.

HANSEN: Well, it is really indeed very, very striking how short our collective memory of this suffering is, or how great our need to perhaps repress and push aside a number of these very unpleasant facts. I think it's striking.

MORELLO: On the sanctions, you've mentioned the shortsightedness of letting these people stew in their own juices, Mr. Littlejohns says. What about sanctions? This is one of the issues that was raised but not answered in the Secretary-General's report. Sanctions against anybody. Its effect on the civilians, on the innocent. How do you view

that now? What's being -- have you come to any kind of conclusion on it? Is there a study going on on it?

HANSEN: There are studies going on, and indeed, we are looking into what are the effects of sanctions on the weakest parties in society. I suppose the part of the philosophy behind sanctions is that you put pressure on the government to yield to the demands that are being made on the assumption that that government will somehow be responsive to the suffering of the people, but as we see --

MORELLO: That doesn't necessarily happen.

LITTLEJOHNS: And in the case of Haiti, certainly not.

MORELLO: Or in the case of Iraq.

HANSEN: In a number of countries, yes.

ADEYEMI: Yes. You mentioned land mines in Angola. I was wondering, if these mines are not cleared, for example, whatever effort is being put in by the international community will probably be -- will not achieve the kind of success you expect. Are you also involved in the clearance of these kinds of mines?

HANSEN: Very much so. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs is the focal department in the UN and the UN system for land mine questions. And that is indeed another horrendous problem, that our little globe is infested with somewhere between 100 and 120 million land mines, many of them as big as such, that can be hidden, that are in the fields, are in the roads, are denying children the possibility of a normal existence. You can't follow the cattle, you can't go out and play without running a terrible risk of being blown up.

ADEYEMI: So how would you relate your success in the area of land mine clearance, in Angola, for example?

HANSEN: Well, you ask have we reached success, and that's a difficult question to answer. In Angola, there are more than 10 million land mines alone. In the world there are about 100 to 120 land mines. There are added to land mines about 2 million a year, and we are removing at the rate of about 100,000 a year. A land mine costs about, down to about $2 to $3 to produce and to place. It costs between $300 and $900 to remove it. So this is a very unfavourable cost balance for getting much ahead with removing land mines. But we are instituting programmes of mine awareness, which are executed by a number of agencies, and we have mine clearance programmes also through trained national personnel who are getting to work on this. But this can only, for instance in Angola, be done after a peace agreement.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is World Chronicle. Our guest is Peter Hansen, Under-Secretary-General for the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs. Ted Morello?

MORELLO: I was wondering about the feasibility of ever completing this mine clearing situation. I remember not so many years ago being in Ringkøbing in Jutland, in which World War Two mines were still on the beaches there. This was almost a generation afterwards, and there were still.... And Libya, from the North African campaign, was still suffering under land mines. And these were relatively minor compared to what's been going on: Cambodia, for example; Afghanistan; and now in many African countries. How hopeful are you that you can ever solve this problem?

HANSEN: One can be hopeful to come around to solve it, to have some international agreement on the banning of land mines. It's something for which there is a very strongly growing political support and constituency in many places, and I think for those who are producing them, those taking decisions about them, if they had seen the rows of people laid out on floors with poorly amputated limbs in a place like Angola, they would rush very much back to influence their politicians and influence their delegations in the United Nations to get something very seriously and very definitively done about this problem. There can be no defense for weapons that indiscriminately kill innocent civilians and maim them by the hundreds of thousands.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Hansen, you mentioned the high cost of removing these mines. Does the UN have a budget for that? Does your department have a budget for it? Or do you leave it to national governments?

HANSEN: We have a very small budget, as does the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, with whom we work in this field, but that is only to maintain a few staff to study the project. What we have to do is to mobilize resources for every situation where there is a land mine problem, as we have done with regard to Afghanistan, where there is an ongoing programme that is making good progress, in Cambodia, and in Mozambique, where unfortunately we have not been as effective and fast as we should have been, but where finally we are beginning to make some headway there also.

ADEYEMI: I do know that the DHA has a training programme for disaster management around the world. I mean, they've carried out a lot of programmes. But I don't know if you are also involved in encouraging countries to establish disaster management units which would complement the efforts of the DHA in this regard.

HANSEN: Oh, very much so. I mean, DHA could never in and of itself manage every calamity in the world, natural disaster, man-made disaster, and very much of our

efforts is indeed to strengthen the capacity of countries to predict the likeliness of disasters, and when disasters can be predicted have preparedness and prevention measures. And very, very much can be achieved by saving human lives and saving other assets through preparedness. Indeed, we just had a major international conference on that in Yokohama, where an international declaration on disaster preparedness was elaborated and where countries are committing themselves to take preparedness measures.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Hansen, speaking of conferences, there's a very important conference coming up in your country, Denmark, early in 1995 which is called the Social Summit. It's going to bring together leaders from all over the world at the highest level, and among the problems they will be discussing are those of impoverished people. Now, humanitarian aid is directed at impoverished people. Is your Department going to make a contribution to that debate?

HANSEN: We will be making a contribution like everybody else will, and we think that the Summit can be a very useful instrument in, as they say, sensitizing international opinion to the inequalities there are in the world and to the unnecessary human suffering there is by lack of attention to issues of social equality, et cetera. But the Social Summit will deal with a very much broader range of issues than the very, very life threatening situations that we in the humanitarian field are dealing with. We are dealing, if you will, in depth with the smallest segment of more immediate life threatening situations than the Social Summit, which is looking at greater issues of equity in all societies.

MORELLO: I wonder how much your work is hampered by the distinction between refugees and displaced persons. For example, the UNHCR, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees says if the displaced person is within the country, they can't touch him, it's outside their mandate. A matter of sovereignty, obviously. How important, how damaging is this to your work?

HANSEN: Well, if you're an international humanitarian lawyer, you will, of course, feel very strongly about international humanitarian law as it relates to refugees; it's not applicable to internal displaced, internal refugees, if you will. But if you look at many of the crisis situations today, in many situations where borders are becoming increasingly irrelevant and we are dealing with really regional issues that are not explained by a political map very well, you would see that whether you suffer inside your own border or you suffer on the other side of it really does make very little difference to --

MORELLO: The amount of suffering, little difference which side of the border he's on, yes.

HANSEN: And in fact now, in fact now we have a situation where we have maybe 20 million refugees in the world, but we have a much larger number, maybe upwards now of 25, 26 million internally displaced persons. And we are coming to deal with this in a more pragmatic manner in the UN system, where, for instance now in Rwanda we are involving the High Commissioner for Refugees very closely in the work for internally displaced persons inside the country too. That has been done by the Secretary-General asking for that from the HCR. We have to throw all the resources we can at the problem, and we cannot just sit and be prisoners and be captivated by artificial distinctions of the past.

LITTLEJOHNS: You work very closely with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, I take it, but the refugee problem, per se, is not your main concern, is it?

HANSEN: Well, it is among our concerns, but we have a very capable and a very effective agency in the High Commission for Refugees. They look after one humanitarian dimension as far as it relates to refugees, but we have many other concerns and many other agencies we have to depend upon and involve, such as the World Food Programme, that looks after food needs; we have UNICEF, which is very important in a number of both food needs and non-food needs, in particular water resources, sanitation -- water and sanitation have been such a big problem in many of these crises; the Food and Agricultural Organization, WHO. Many of these agencies have a very important contribution to make, as indeed do some of the main actors with whom we in the international community could do very little, and that is the non-governmental organizations.

LITTLEJOHNS: Before we came on camera you mentioned the problem of Chernobyl, which most people seem to have forgotten about, because it happened back in the late 1980s, I believe. But it's a very serious problem that you're still having to address, I understand.

HANSEN: It is a very serious problem, and it is a very serious problem for those countries that it directly affected, where you still have a great amount of disease, a great number of deformed children at birth, a lot of birth defects and so on, still long lingering effects of that technological catastrophe. And it is one that, unfortunately, has again disappeared very much off the screen, as it were, and it is not as easy as I would have hoped it would be to raise resources to look into the problems that the burndown of the plant caused. Because this is, again, a problem we might have to face again, and it

would be good to have learned this much about prevention and treatment of the casualties that come from it.

LITTLEJOHNS: So what precisely is your department doing about it?

HANSEN: We are coordinating a number of medical and other research programmes into the problems, and we are trying to mobilize efforts of treatment of those who have suffered from it. But I think very importantly it would be of relevance to the larger international community to learn about such things and learn about how to deal with them next time they happen, because they very likely would happen again.

MORELLO: How does one deal with the question of impartiality of the military presence versus the humanitarian presence when both sides are likely to say that your efforts on behalf of the humanitarians are against them and so forth? That's being addressed, I know, but is anything being gained by it?

HANSEN: Well, it's a perennial problem that, in an ongoing conflict, military conflict, when you try to help people in need, either party, depending on which way the battle is going, is likely to find that you are influencing the situation of the relative strength of the parties. And we are working by establishing a number of principles for impartiality and neutrality in conflicts that will respect the humanitarian imperative.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Hansen, we have less than a minute left. Would you say that what is essentially a bit of an experiment in setting up this department of yours -- because it's an innovative thing in the United Nations system -- is it working out successfully, would you say? Are you really overcoming the problems?

HANSEN: Well, I might not be the right person to ask about that, because --

LITTLEJOHNS: Oh, don't be modest --

HANSEN: -- I'm standing right in the middle of it, but without being too immodest, I think yes, I feel that we have a lot of very good results to report. We have an unprecedented degree of cooperation among UN agencies and within NGOs, and I think that that is something the UN system and the member states are supporting that they can be very proud and satisfied with.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Hansen, that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of World Chronicle. Our guest has been Peter Hansen, Under-Secretary-General for the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs. He was interviewed by Segun Adeyemi of the News Agency of Nigeria, and Ted Morello of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of world Chronicle.

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